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ABSTRACT

Rural teachers of vocational agriculture, realizing the need for access to current information in their field, obtained funds for initiating the use of a computerized telecommunications service. The service selected, AgriData Network, includes reports of news, markets, and trends; a collection of over 500 teaching plans in all subject areas in agriculture; a daily feature of condensed current events in agriculture; and an electronic mail service. Fifteen schools were selected as sites for demonstration of the telecommunication system. Phone modems and a 1-year subscription fee were purchased for each school. Local districts provided the necessary computer equipment as their part of the cost-sharing effort. In-service programs were conducted to assist teachers in use of the equipment, accessing the AgriData Network and incorporating the information into their courses. Among the benefits of the telecommunications system is community involvement. Parents in the farming and ranching community are highly interested in the capability of the network to access current market information and are dropping by the schools to review the latest reports. Some teachers are planning adult evening classes using the lessons available from the networks. A sample news report and a lesson plan on current issues in agriculture are appended. (JHZ)

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ENRICHING THE RURAL SCHOOL CURRICULUM THROUGH TELECOMMUNICATIONS

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Introduction

Rural teachers continually struggle with the problem of obtaining up-to-date resources, especially in subject areas where current information is of high interest and need. One such group in Wyoming are the vocational agriculture teachers. In the attempts to teach their students competencies such as developing marketing strategies, planning livestock health management systems, and selecting irrigation systems, teachers found textbooks lacking and resource persons limited. In many communities the local newspaper relies entirely on local happenings to fill its pages. In one community, the teacher indicated that the local newspaper, the "Boomerang" should have been more appropriately named the "Rumorbang."

Teachers also felt much frustration in attempting to keep informed of current events in agriculture such as the economic crisis, market prices, trends and forecasts, agricultural policy, world trade, and government programs.

It was observed also that the content of students' reports and assigned speeches were lacking in depth due to limited references. Needed library resources were often available on loan from other libraries, but limited in terms of time required to receive the materials.

Method

The teacher educators in agriculture, realizing the need, investigated the possibilities of computerized telecommunications services that provided access to current information appropriate for vocational agriculture. A firm called "AgriData Resources" located in Milwaukee provided such a service. Briefly, the features included a series of reports on news, markets, and trends, a collection of over 500 teaching

plans in all subject areas in agriculture, a special daily feature of condensed current events in agriculture, and an electronic mail service which allowed fast written electronic communication among users.

To obtain funds for initiating the project, a proposal was submitted to the State Department of Education and approved under the Carl Perkins Vocational Education appropriations.

Fifteen schools were selected as exemplary sites for demonstration of the telecommunication system. Phone modems and a one-year subscription fee were purchased for each school. The local districts provided the necessary computer equipment as their part of the cost-sharing effort. The project staff and a graduate assistant delivered the equipment and installed the hardware.

As part of the grant, in-service programs were conducted to assist teachers in use of the equipment, accessing the AgriData Network and incorporating the information into their curriculum.

First, a large group session was conducted utilizing a computer laboratory and multiple phone hookups. Then, at another workshop on a computer-related topic, teachers rotated on an individual basis, acquiring more skills on accessing the various features of the system. The latter approach turned out to be the more effective format, resulting in much more progress by the teachers.

Use of the Agridata Network by teachers and students is limited only by one's imagination. Bulletins and news information from major state universities, the Associated Press, market analysts, commodity exchanges, state departments of agriculture, Senate and House Agricultural Committee Proceedings, Census Bureau, and major agricultural periodicals are easily accessed by code number or by keyword searching, similar to that used in the ERIC system.

A special section, Ag Ed Network provides access to over 500 curriculum lessons on a wide range of topics. One particular advantage to the teacher and students is that the phone modem and hardware provided by the grant allows the user to save on a diskette file any information obtained. Therefore, with careful organization of files, the teacher can accumulate a large collection of lesson plans on diskettes.

Of particular interest is the capability for students to access a multitude of reference material quickly when researching a topic. By using the key word search approach, the student can obtain current references that relate directly to the topic.

The electronic mail capability is just beginning to be explored by the participants. Teachers and students are able to communicate with peers in another community in a way that is new and exciting. One teacher, faced with a deadline for a news article in another town, typed in his story, sent it by electronic mail to a teacher in the other town to relay the document to the newspaper office by the deadline. Students are beginning to converse with their peers in other communities about regional and statewide events. A weekly newsletter is prepared by the project staff and sent out electronically to all teachers participating in the project.

One benefit that has arisen from the use of the telecommunications in the classroom is the community involvement. Parents of students in the farming and ranching community are highly interested in the capability of the network to access current market information and are dropping by the school to review the latest reports. One teacher sets up a daily bulleting board on his computer each morning and leaves his modem connected to the phone line to receive calls. A distant rancher

calls the school computer which answers by sending the current bulletin board thereby saving him a trip into town.

Some of the teachers are planning adult evening classes utilizing the lessons available on the AgriData Network. One in particular accessed a marketing trends report and used the material to make handouts and transparencies for his class.

Summary

The key to the level of success achieved in this project has been the close contact maintained by the project staff and the intensive individualized, in-service provided. Teachers receive weekly mail, a monthly newsletter from Agridata and have access to a toll-free number when technical assistance is needed.

Although the project has only been in operation for six months, including three summer months, a new enthusiasm is being observed in vocational agriculture classrooms. Already, students are showing a renewed interest in seeking new information.

APPENDIX

SAMPLE NEWS REPORT AND CURENT ISSUES

IN AGRICULTURE LESSON PLAN

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SANCTIONS TO HURT FARMERS? ANS049
10/02/86 07:53AM E2 34 lines

AgriData News Service -- The trade retaliation threatened by South Africa could cost American farmers some $270 million in exports, according to Treasury Secretary James Baker.

Baker was interviewed this morning on the NBC Today Show. The Senate votes today on the override of President Reagan's veto of a bill that would impose economic sanctions against the South African government.

South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha telephoned U.S. senators Wednesday to warn that U.S. grain imports will be cut off if the Senate overrrides the veto. Senators were quick to condemn Botha's action.

Baker said that the threat "demonstrates that sanctions are a two-way street." He said that there was no question that the policy of apartheid, against which the sanctions are directed, was abhorrent. The question, he said, is whether sanctions are the proper route to attack that policy. The president, he added, believes sanctions will hurt both the South African people and the citizens of neighboring countries.

Asked to comment on Sen. Jesse Helms' remark that the action against South Africa was shooting American farmers in the foot, Baker said that farm exports have been shrinking and "if you cut off another market, you are shooting yourself in the foot."
END

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AGED
Entering Ag Ed Network...

Welcome to Ag Ed Network!
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*RUN
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*AG1
Scroll activated.

AG ED TODAY AG1
10/02/86 03:32AM D0 101 lines

THURSDAY, October 2, 1986 -- An amendment to make changes in the 1985 farm act was defeated in the Senate by a 53-45 vote Wednesday. The Republican-controlled Senate Budget Committee defeated the amendment by saying that it would have violated the budget resolution by raising the cost of farm programs. The amendment would have raised the soybean loan rate and established a sunseed price support program. (See CNS091.)

USDA's September 29 announcement of the maximum 20% unpaid acreage reduction with no paid diversion for the '87 feed grains program isn't final. Under the '85 farm bill, Agriculture Sec. Lyng has full authority to offer PIK-paid diversion on a bid basis "at any time prior to harvest" to prevent a

burdensome stocks buildup. A variety of other surplus reduction options remain available. (See ANS017.)

The feedgrains program announced last week will probably be amended with a paid land diversion, according to Dennis Steadman, vice president agriculture for Chase Econometrics. "I expect he'll (Ag. Sec. Lyng) add a 10% paid land diversion to the program," Steadman said in a phone interview. Steadman said that the paid land diversion payments will be less than the cost to the Commodity Credit Corp. without the diversion. (See ANS042.)

The sharp price sag following last week's USDA hogs and pigs report has actually caused some producers to delay herd expansion altogether, says Chris Hurt, agricultural economist at Purdue University. While there is widespread belief among analysts that the report had some inaccuracies, both cash and futures masrkets sagged and producers who had planned to increase output next year are having second thoughts. (See ANS041.)

The Soviet purchase of between 1 and 4 million metric tons of heavily subsidized wheat from the European Community (EC) should trigger an immediate U.S. government response. That's the demand from the National Association of Wheat Growers. (See ANS016.)

USDA announced Wednesday that commodity loans disbursed in October by the Commodity Credit Corporation will carry a 5-3/4 percent interest rate. This is down from 6-1/8 percent, reflecting the U.S. Treasury's lower interest rate charged to CCC. (See ANS019.)

Grain and pulse harvesting, except for corn, had been completed on 103.8 million hectares in the USSR as of September 22, a U.S. agricultural attache in Moscow said in a report dated September 25. The attache, citing a report in Pravda, said 100 million hectares of grains and pulses had been threshed as of September 22. At about this time in 1985, 103.6 million hectares had been harvested and 99.9 million had been threshed, the attache said. (See CNS057.)

Cotton production in China for 1986-87 (Sep-Aug) is forecast at 4.2 million metric tons, compared to 4.146 million estimated for 1985-86, the U.S. agricultural counselor in Peking said in a report dated September 24. The counselor said exports for 1986-87 were forecast at 600,000 metric tons, the same as the year before. (See CNS062.)

The 1986 Farm Progress Show, scheduled to be held in the Des Moines area, threw in the towel Tuesday after more than 1.5 inches of rain pelted the

ground Monday night. The show's cancellation means an estimated loss of $5 million to $6 million in revenue for the Des Moines area.(See DMR1.)

In the futures markets Wednesday, soybeans, wheat closed up, corn was up as well, except for March '87 down 1/4. Live hogs and cattle were up, except for December '87 hogs, down 5 cents, and August '87 cattle, down 5 cents. The Dow Jones industrial average was up 15.32, closing at 1782.90.

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Explain what Dennis Steadman of Chase Econometrics means when he says that the paid land diversion payments will be less than the cost to the Commodity Credit Corp. without the diversion?

(Discussion points: For every bushel of grain not produced, that is one less bushel CCC will have to worry about being forfeited under the loan program. That means less money paid out from the Government Treasury. Other costs that would be saved would be storage costs. Steadman believes that government payments for diversion would be lower than the costs of loans and storage.)

2. Who would want a commodity loan right now anyway? And is the lower interest rate good news for someone receiving the loan, or bad news?

(Discussion points: Anyone putting their harvested commodity into storage would receive their loan when the grain is delivered to the government approved storage. The lower interest rate is good for the producer receiving the loan, because that means the rate of interest being charged to have the loan is lower, and less money will have to be paid by the producer to pay off the loan. There's more room for taking profit.)

3. If you were a hog producer what would you think about Chris Hurt's comments about the reaction to USDA's Hogs and Pigs report?

(Discussion points: It's really good news for the producer who is planning for the future. If producers are delying expansion, it means that the period of higher prices and good profits will last longer. A sag in prices this fall could help a great deal to prevent overly-optimistic expansion following the excellent profits producers had last summer.)

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